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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0517
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1382
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1249
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3564
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 1818
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2366
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000396

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, EUR/ACE, SCA/PPD, ECA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [KPAO](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: GOOD TONE IN MEETING WITH EDUCATION
MINISTER, BUT NO BREAKTHROUGHS

REF: A. ASHGABAT 0375

[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 0251

[1](#)1. (SBU) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Charge's March 25 meeting with Minister of Education Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov, although cordial and cooperative in tone, did not result in any breakthroughs for education cooperation. Although there was ample opportunity for the Turkmen participants to raise concerns about U.S. programs at this meeting, the Minister did not. We do not believe there will be any appreciable improvement so long as International Relations Director Nury Bayramov calls the shots. For more on Bayramov, see reftel A, paras 6-7. END SUMMARY.

PLEASANT MEETING, BROAD VIEW, FEW PROBLEMS

[1](#)3. (SBU) Charge and PAO met with Minister of Education Muhammetgeldi Annaamanov and the Ministry's International Relations Director Nury Bayramov on March 25. The Charge used the meeting to accent the positive in a review of Embassy and Ministry cooperation. In particular he provided information on a current Turkmen FLEX high school exchange student who was called a "hero" by his host family for saving his host father's life. The Minister was visibly impressed by this story, which the Charge stressed was an example of the genuine people-to-people relationships and bonds that develop through exchanges. (NOTE: Post will also try to publicize the FLEX student's heroism through state media. END NOTE.)

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Charge followed up on the recent visit of a Columbia University delegation. Annaamanov outlined the Ministry's intention to fund ten students to attend Columbia (NOTE: At this point, Bayramov interrupted the minister to note "there might be funding problems." END NOTE.), begin cooperation and exchanges among faculty, and possibly start a masters' program with Columbia's assistance. He expressed gratitude for the positive and developing relationship with Columbia.

DELAYED AGAIN ON TEA

15. (SBU) The Charge raised the unresolved issue of the Ministry's pending approval for three American Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) participants to carry out programs in their counterpart schools. The Minister looked to Bayramov and seemed a little surprised that the issue was still outstanding, since the ministry had approved the program and the U.S. participants have already received their Letters of Invitation. Bayramov promised a quick resolution. (COMMENT: Uh-huh. We've heard that one before. END COMMENT.)

ASHGABAT INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

16. (U) When the Charge asked for an update on the status of registration for the Ashgabat International School (AIS), Minister Annaamanov had some difficulty in answering. Bayramov came to his rescue and explained the draft Memorandum of Understanding prepared by AIS and vetted by the Embassy had been reviewed by the Ministry of Education and was now with the Ministry of Justice. After the Ministry of Justice has reviewed the memorandum, it would then be returned to Ministry of Education to be transmitted back to the Embassy via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with any comments and revisions.

DELAYED INVITATION

17. (SBU) Annaamanov also invited the Embassy to send American participants to an upcoming International Education Exhibition and Conference in Ashgabat, May 1-3, organized by MOE. Since the Embassy had not yet received the invitation, Bayramov promised to send it that same day, via the Foreign Ministry. (COMMENT: Given the late notice, it will be difficult to find attendees. END

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COMMENT.) The Charge suggested for future education conferences the Ministry of Education advertise in "The Chronicle of Higher Education," which he assured the Minister and Bayramov is not a U.S. government publication.

THE UNSPOKEN ISSUES

18. (SBU) The Charge invited the Minister to raise any problems or questions he has with Embassy programs. This was an opportunity to raise concerns about the FLEX program or the government's request for information on American host families (reftel B). Separately, Post has been given a heads-up that Bayramov might seek to disrupt planned testing for a scholarship program that would send Turkmen students to the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, or the Kazakh Institute of Management, Economics, and Strategic Planning (KIMEP, by its Russian acronym) set for April 5-6. Although these issues linger, the Minister had no concerns to raise and simply thanked the Embassy for its work. Bayramov sat in silence.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: While there was no major breakthrough, the meeting helped improve the tone of relations, especially following the Ministry's strong criticisms of the FLEX program (reftel B) and recent disputes over TOEFL and other standardized testing sessions. Although there was ample opportunity for MOE to raise concerns about U.S. programs at this meeting, the Minister did not. So long as Bayramov continues to run the shop and control the timid minister, education cooperation will not appreciably improve. END COMMENT.

HOAGLAND